

Ennobling the Quality of Human Life

Bhikkhu Dhammavihari

The year 1998 witnesses fifty years of political independence in Sri Lanka. Those who were born in this country after 1948 cannot be expected to have any idea as to what life was like here prior to independence. Histories of many countries in the world are now being re-written, secretly and overtly. This is being done with the histories of ethnic and religious groups too. It is all part of an endeavour to place each group competitively well above the others. At the same time, old world myths of religious and race superiority are also being ruthlessly exploded every day.

While there is a desire to get nearer to what is acceptable as the truth, there is also, through ingenious fabrications and a great deal of propaganda, a grossly visible drifting away from facts and realities. There is more talk of miraculous events and make-believe stories. Volumes and volumes are being written on these and they make inroads even into the new information highway of the electronic media. While we have not much desire to theorize on these or offer explanations for any, it is good to keep ourselves informed of these maneuvers in order to minimize the dangers that could befall the uninformed. It is well to know that all cases of such construction, or more precisely reconstruction, are prompted by vested interests and party loyalties. The process is subtly devised to be much more effective than atomic explosions or outer space conquests.

All these only take humanity for a ride. It is not a world in which there can be any growth or development. In the hope of a better world tomorrow, people incline to believe in more and more newly created visions of divinities, shrines and temples. They hopefully await results. Buddhism treats all these as rewardless search for shelter, particularly in weaker moments of fear, risk of life through ill health and accidents and the search for social escalation.

Buddhism looks up to growth and development from within man. Qualities of head and heart must be nurtured and made to grow into discernible stature. Then only does man reach divine stature. For that very reason, the recipe for it is called *Brahma-vihāra* or divine modes of living. These qualities must express themselves in one's living. That is why they are called *vihāra*.

The first of these is love or *mettā*. It is the 'spirit of friendliness' of humans towards all living beings, human and animal. It is a direct expression of friendliness, without any receiving or transmitting intermediary. Its communication is direct. It implies a total absence of any hostility or opposition. As one develops this friendliness or *mettā*, all feelings of ill-will or *vyāpāda* disappear. Humans being thus bonded together with all forms of life, without any ill-will, compassion or *karuṇā* comes in its wake. Any pain or suffering in the life of another, i.e. *para-dukkhe*, there is trembling of one's own heart or *hadaya-kampna*. Thus one sees the inter-connected growth of these virtues in a sequence. The third in succession is *muditā* or appreciative joy. This is the ability to rejoice and feel really happy in the success of another. This triad of love, compassion and appreciative joy or *mettā karuṇā muditā* are the supreme virtues of noble living. What an elevation of life or living from human to divine !

These are the much needed virtues of the world today. They are very much in short supply. These would invariably increase the respect for life in the world today, whether that be of humans or animals. Compassion would increase the respect for the possessions of others. It would be unkind and unsympathetic to dispossess others of their legitimate possessions. Appreciative joy would eliminate unhealthy competition and rivalries born of jealousy. In a post-independent Sri Lanka let us hopefully look forward to retrieving these for the good of many.